

Brutalism, masterplans and Swinging London: Piccadilly Circus reimagined 1957-1973

David Gilbert

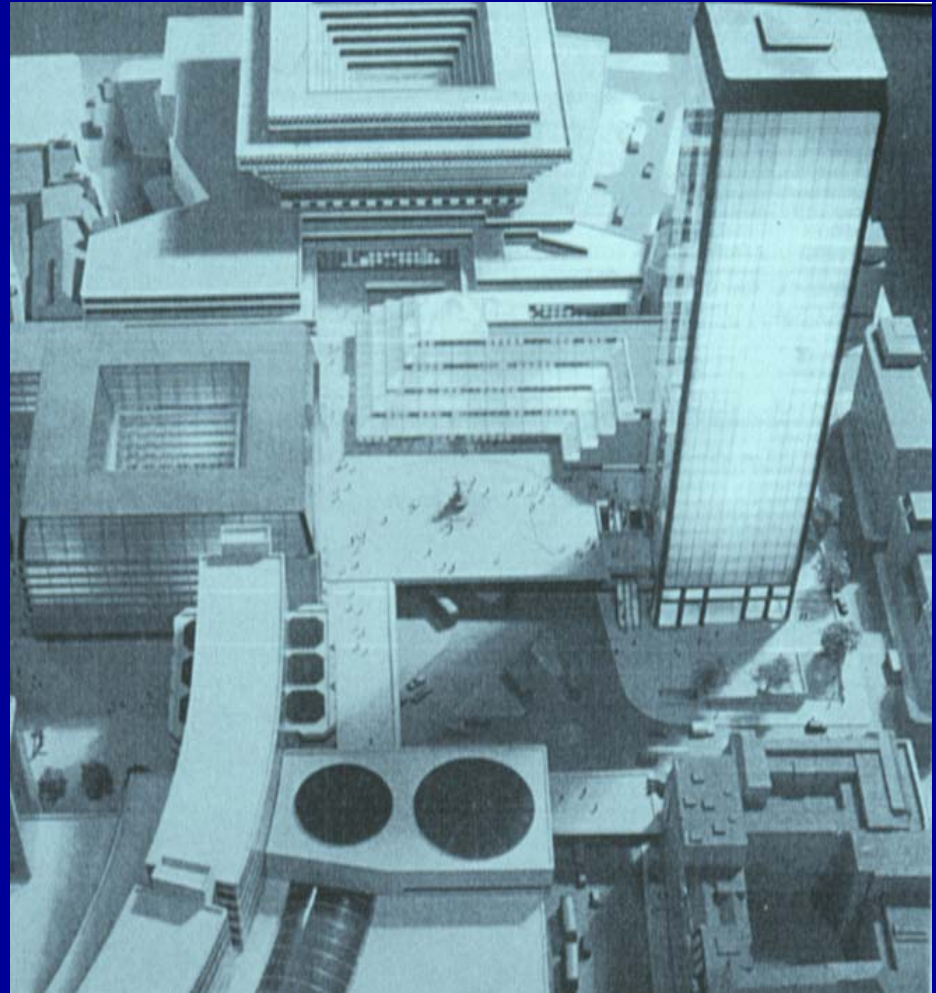
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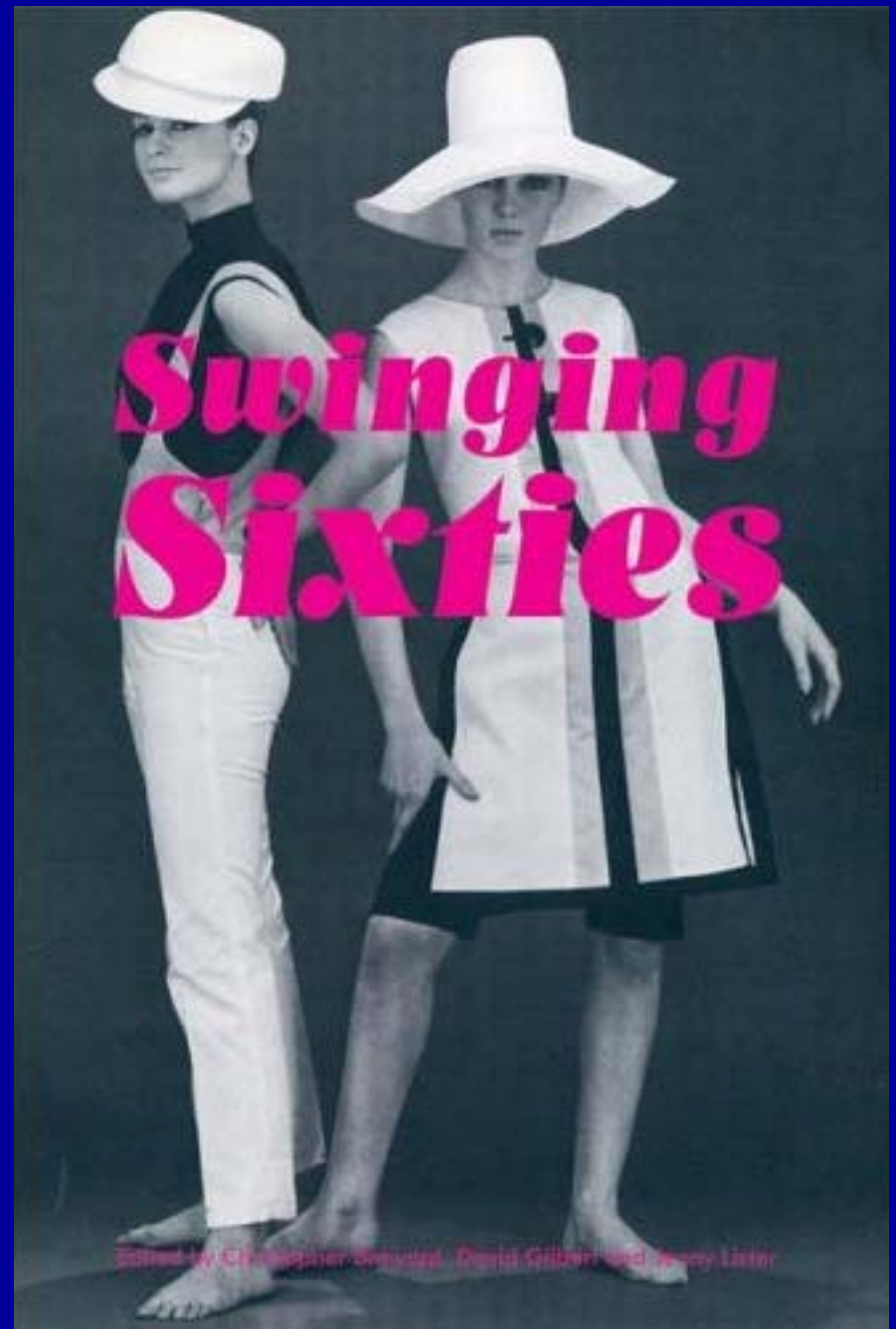
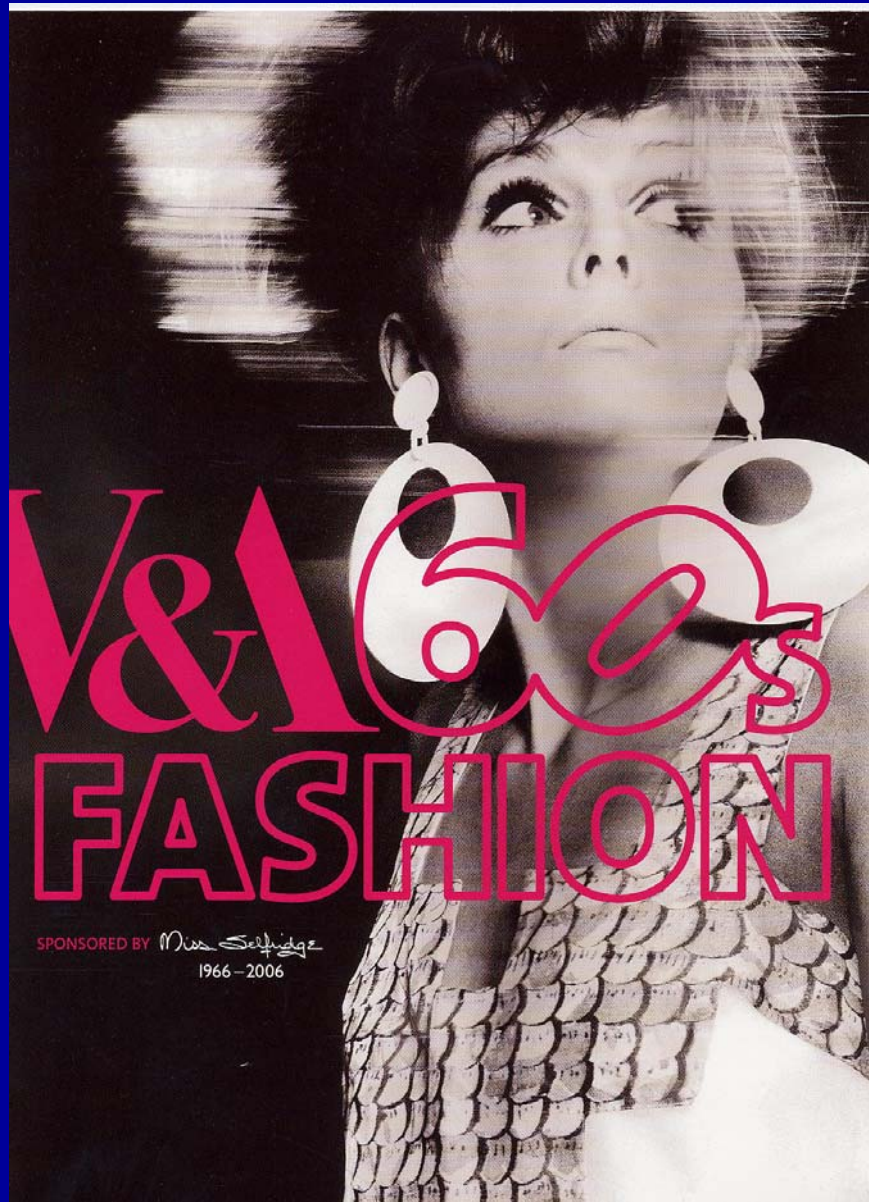
Bronwen Edwards

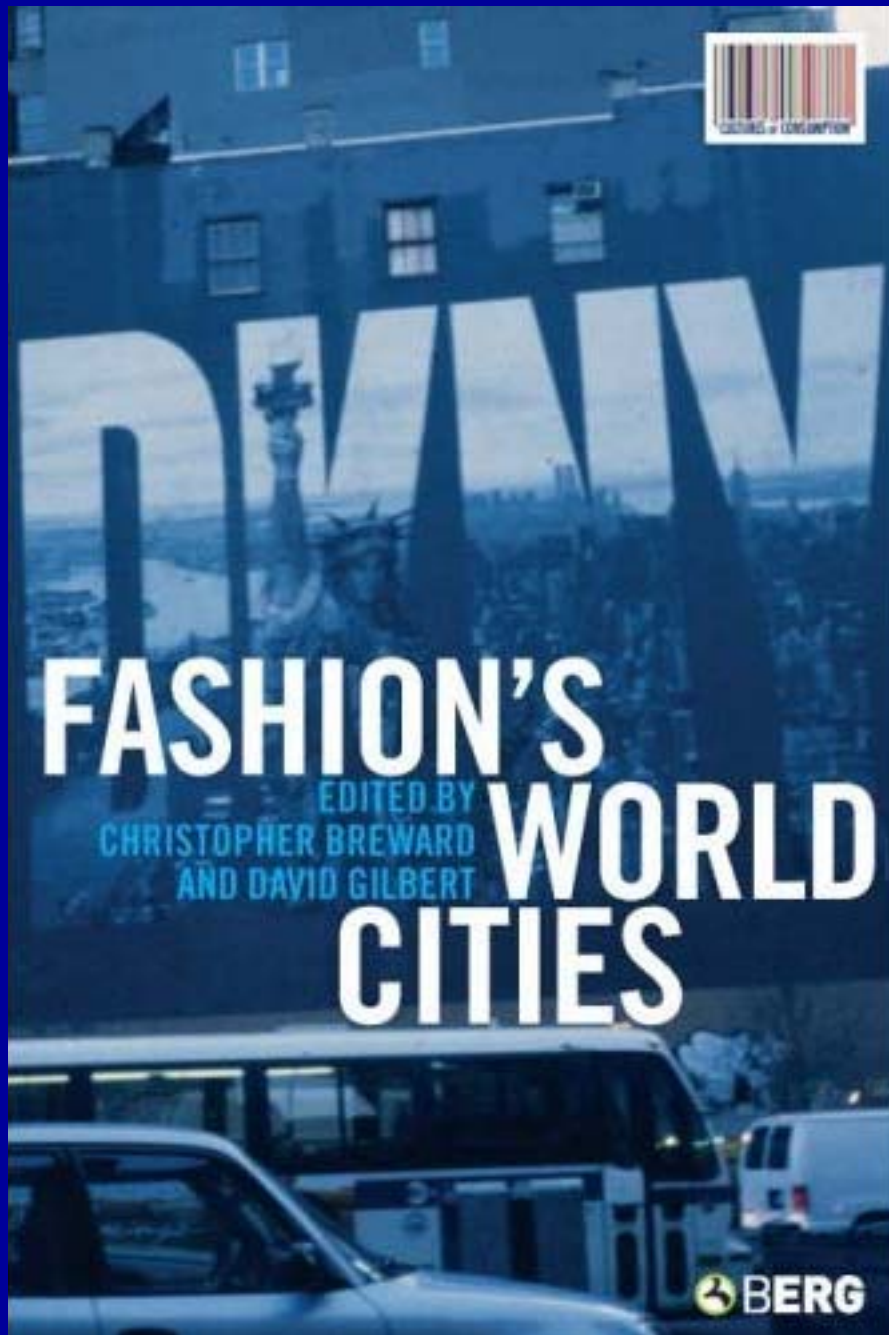
Senior Lecturer in Built Environment

Leeds Metropolitan University









‘Every decade has its city. During the shell-shocked 1940s thrusting New York led the way, and in the uneasy 50s it was the easy Rome of *La Dolce Vita*. Today it is London, a city steeped in tradition, seized by change, liberated by affluence In a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings, it is the scene’
(*Time* April 15 1966: 32).



Piazzadilly!



Proposals for Piccadilly Circus: 1957-1974

- March 1957 LCC gave general approval to Monico proposals
- October 1958 redevelopment plan for Piccadilly Circus by LCC
- May 1960 Public Inquiry refused Monico Application
- 1961, 1962, 1966 William Holford Plans
- 1968 Westminster City Council and GLC issued new overall brief for developers in Piccadilly Circus. Public exhibition July 1968
- November 1968. *Covent Garden Area Draft Plan* GLC, City of Westminster and London Borough of Camden
- March 1971 Publication of Westminster's *Aid to Pedestrian Movement* proposals
- 1972 Westminster City Council proposals
- 1974 GLC announces policy of 'least change'
- 1984 'Cosmetic' urban improvements to traffic flow, street furniture etc.



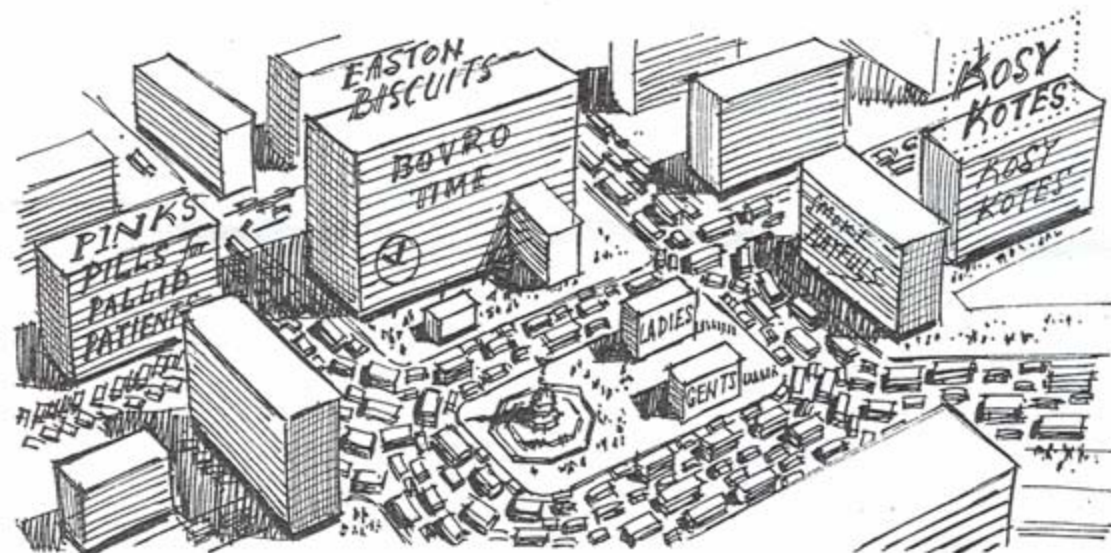
PUNCH PLANS FOR PICCADILLY

*Some fresh thoughts on
rebuilding the Hub of
the Empire*

1. (above) The Classic

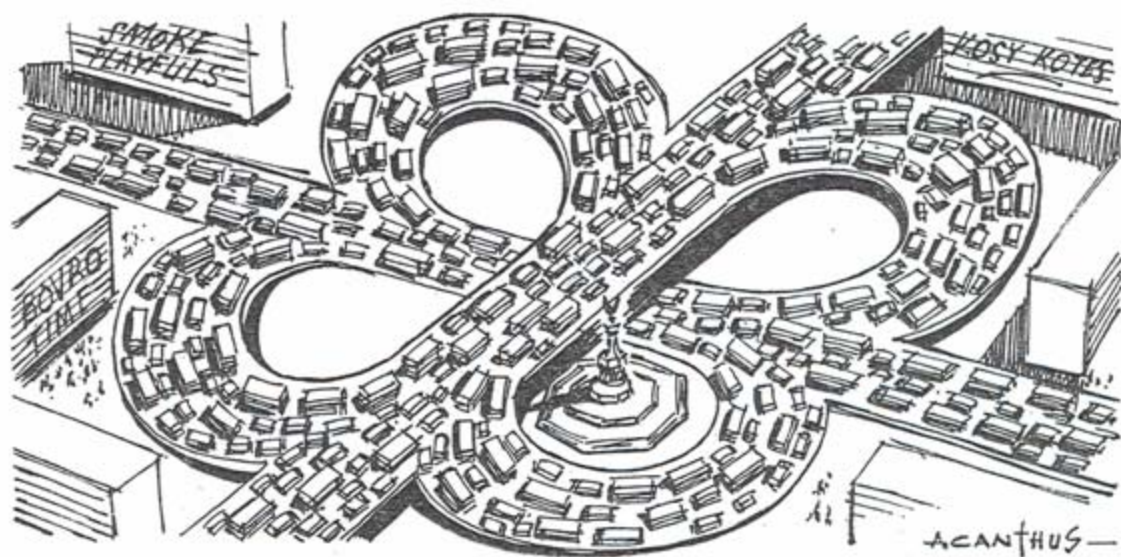
2. (right) The Mediaeval

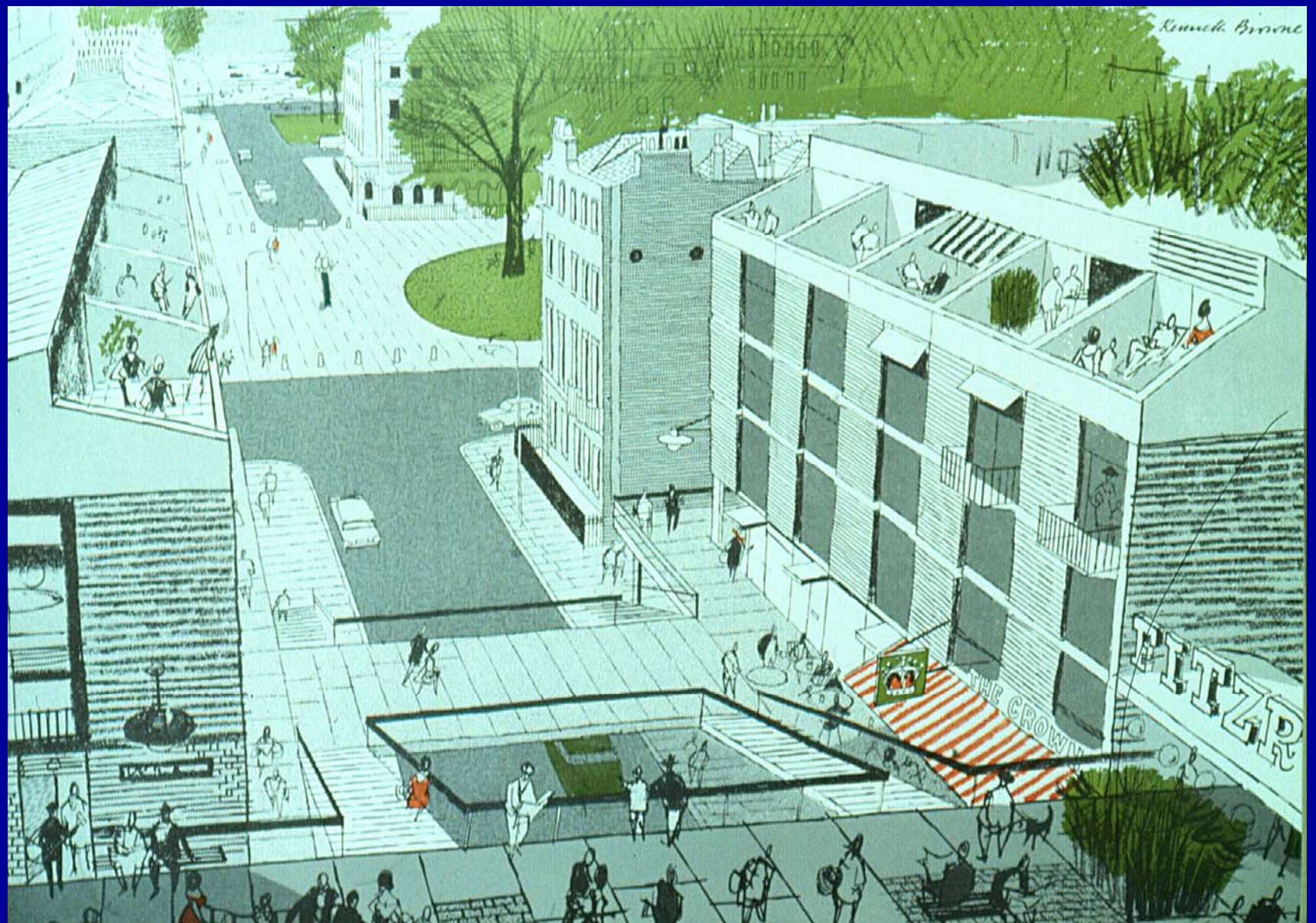




3. The Contemporary

4. The Four-Leaf Clover (for luck)








LONDON

belongs to us



POLITICIANS HAVE FAILED US

Join the People's

MARCH

from St. Paul's Church,
Covent Garden Piazza, 1.30 pm

& RALLY

TRAFALGAR Sq.

Sunday afternoon 2 pm.

1st APRIL 1973

Drawing by BILLIE STRAUMER
Printed in 1973 by BRUCE CLOUTIER 2000 Chapel Street
410 Old Kent Road, SE11
Organized by London's Communities, Political and Environmental Groups
Contact 01 404 3000 or 301 000
Published by C. O. G.
4 Bedford Street, WC2

digital image © Museum of London

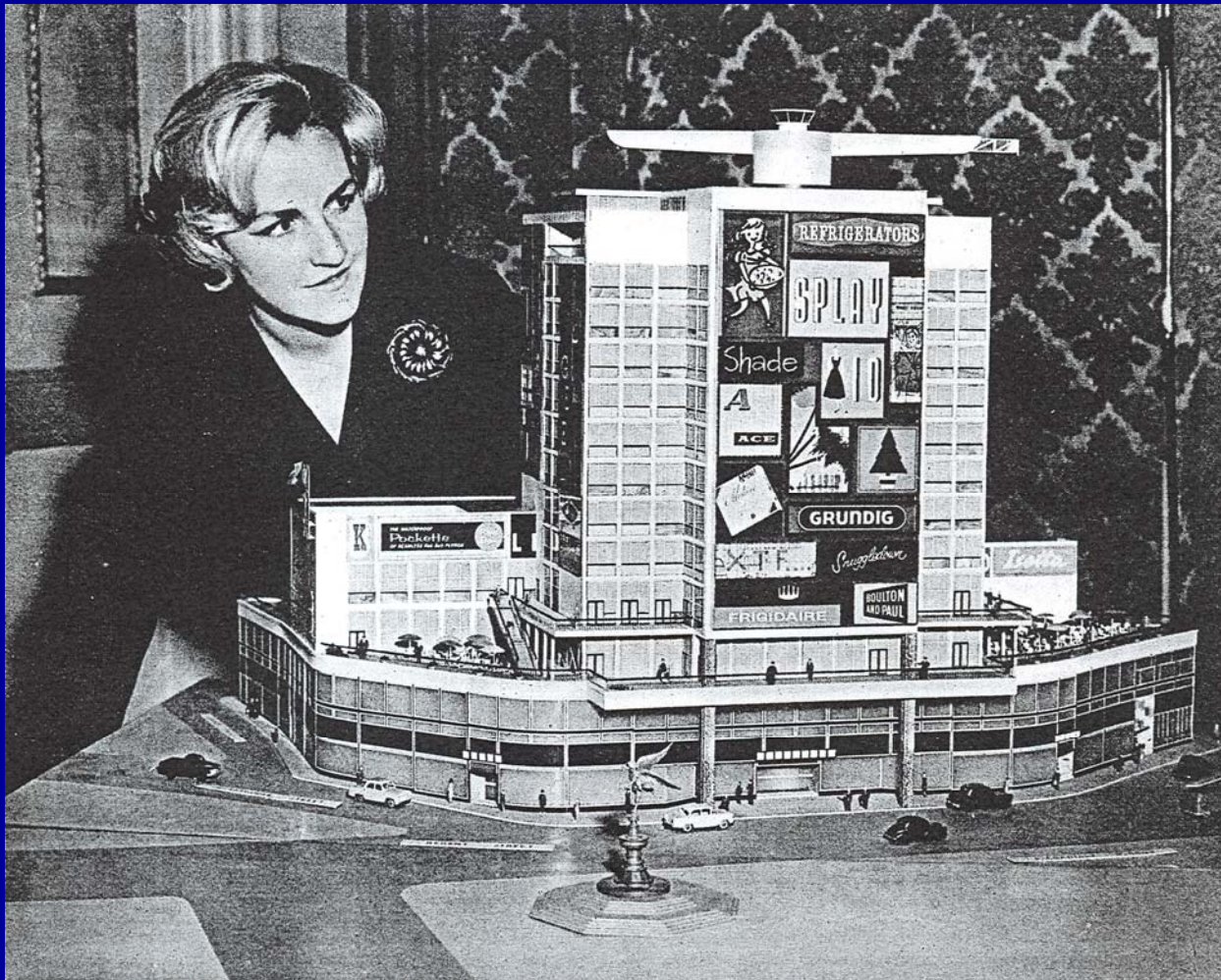


- **‘Chewing Gum House’. The furore over developer Jack Cotton’s 1950s plans.**
- **‘Colossal possibilities, demanding faith’: the metropolitan fantasies of comprehensive development.**
- **Piazzas, citizen-pedestrians and ‘living at peace with the motor car.’**
- **‘The shopper on whose pocket the prosperity of the area depended.’ Consumption and comprehensive redevelopment**



‘Chewing-gum house’

Jack Cotton’s Monico café site proposal 1957



‘Chewing-gum house’

Jack Cotton’s Monico café site proposal 1957





‘The Monster of Piccadilly’

‘Chewing Gum House’



Bernard Levin also felt the existing Circus 'strikingly bereft of anything architecturally meritorious' and that 'Piccadilly Circus is a mess and a ruin, and if it were knocked down tomorrow London would lose nothing and gain a good deal.'



Drawn by Thos. H. Shepherd.

Engraved by Thos. J. Tate.

REGENT'S QUADRANT.

Published June 10, 1827, by Jones & Co's Auction Room, England Road, London.



Piccadilly Circus, London.

Photo: Frank Hurst, U.S.A.





Piccadilly Circus, London.

Photo: Frank Taylor, U.S.A.

2. 'Colossal possibilities, demanding faith': the metropolitan fantasies of comprehensive development.





Photo: Sam Lambert

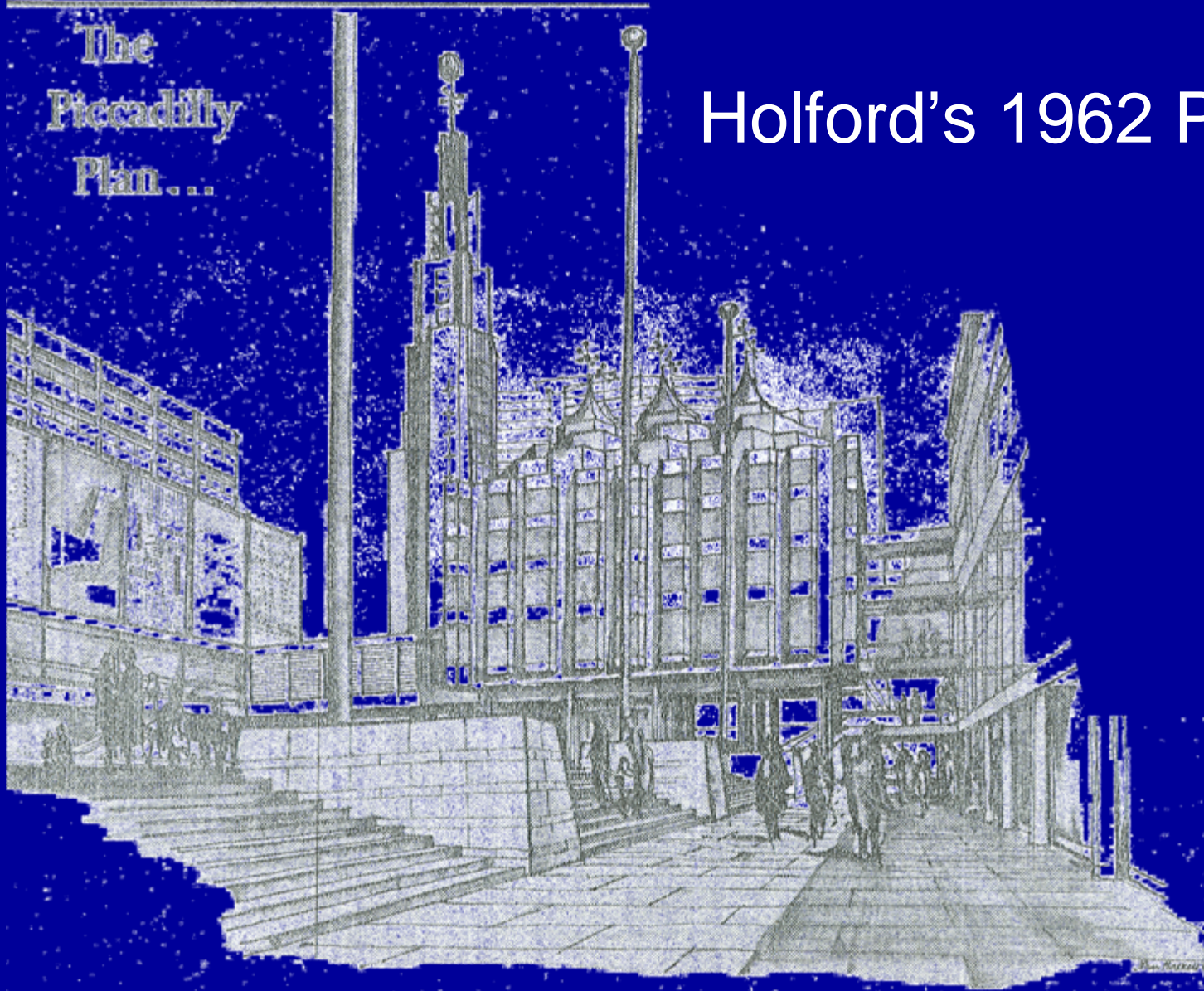
The east side of the New London Pavilion and the vertical feature looking down from the corner of Coventry Street and the Haymarket.



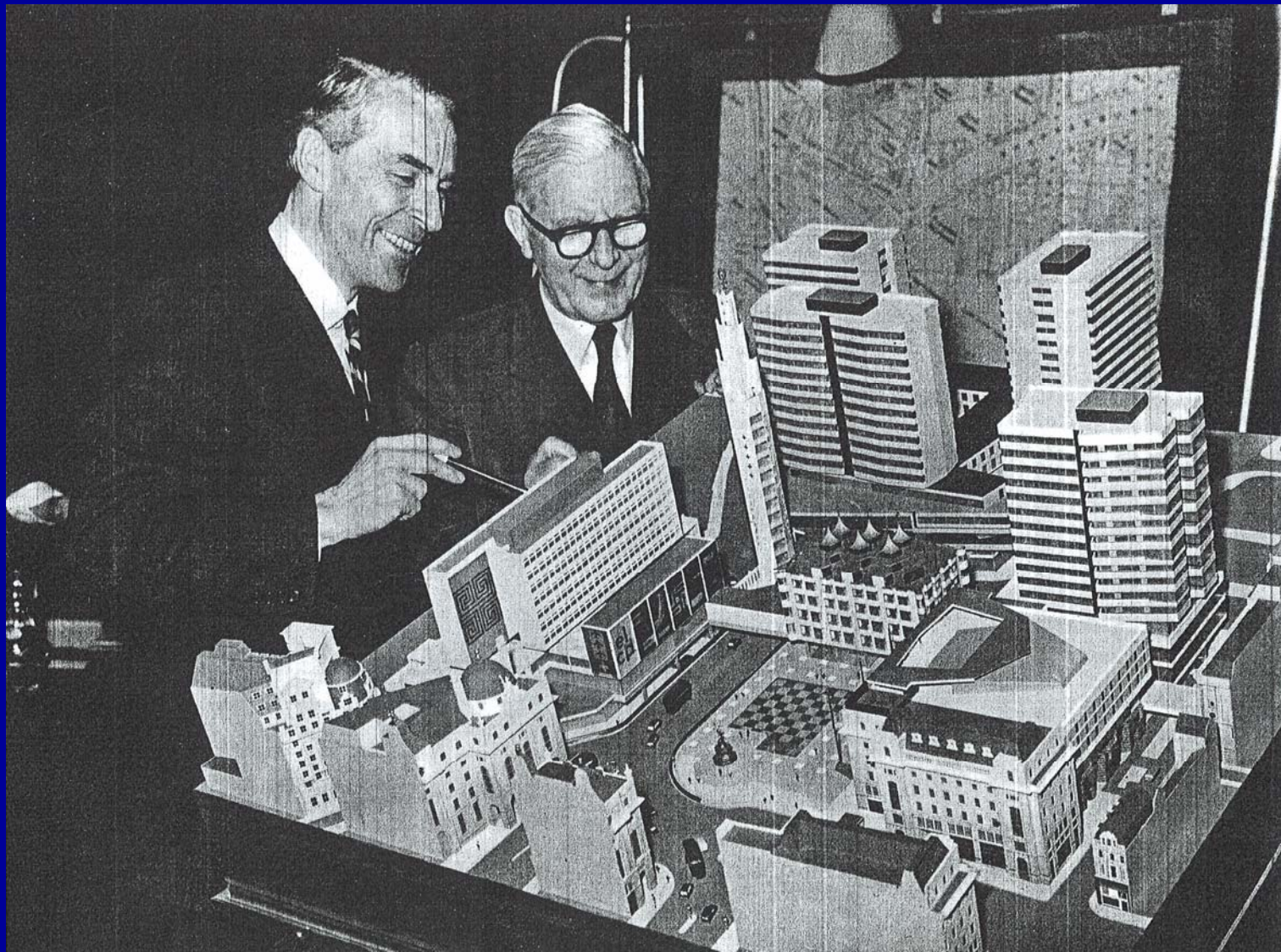
Holford's 1962 Plan

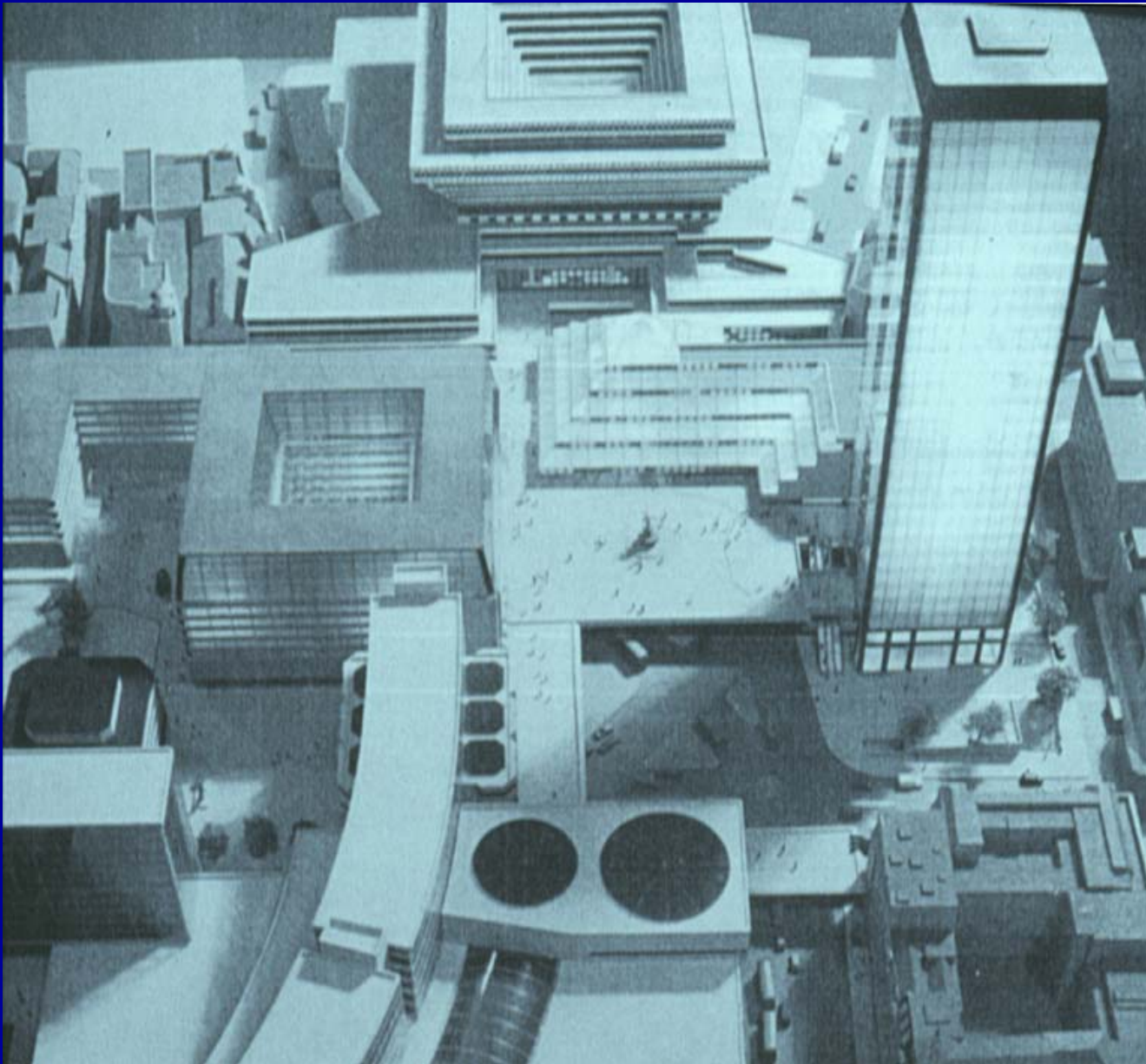
The
Piccadilly
Plan...

Holford's 1962 Plan

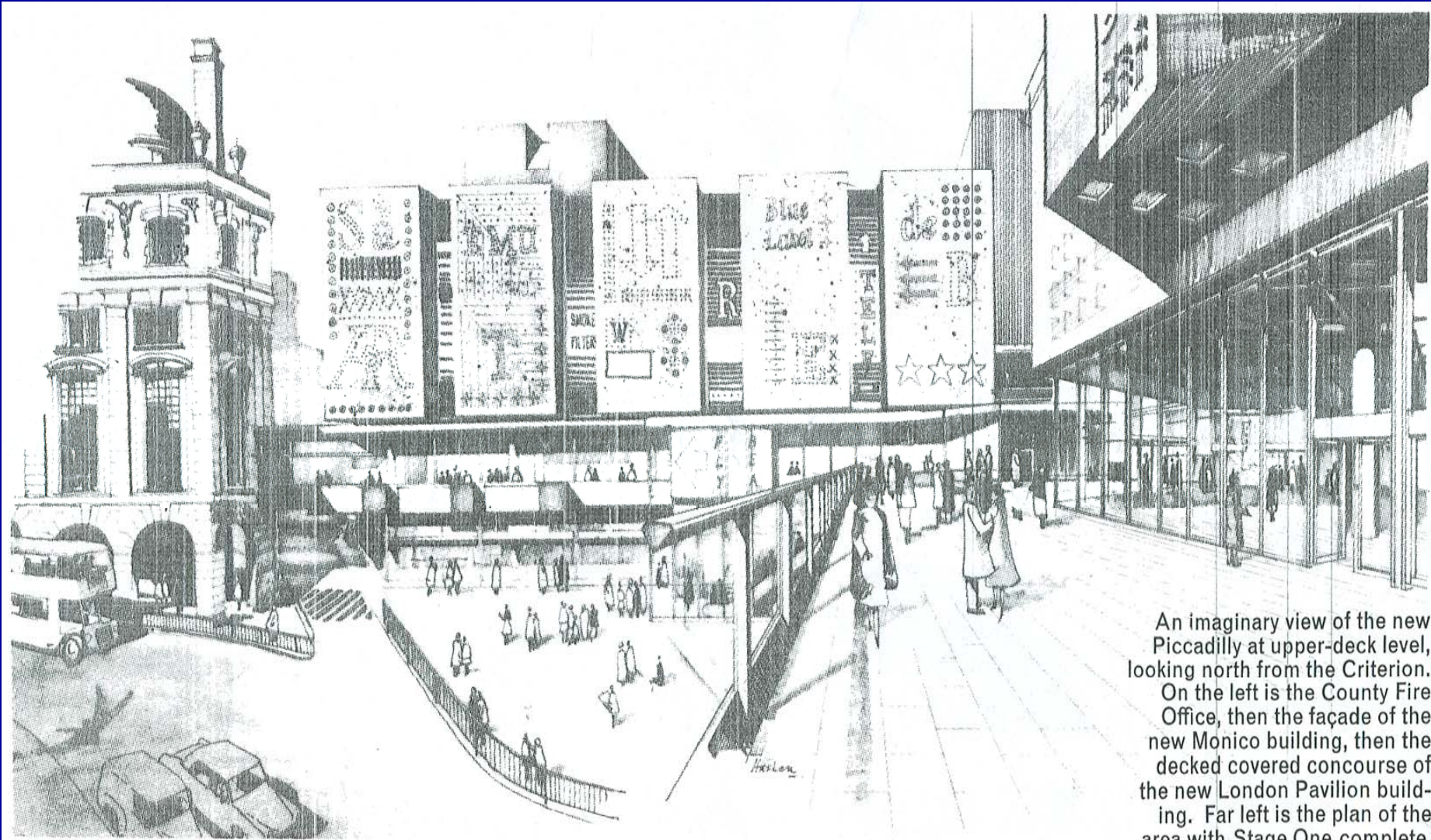


Looking east. Plaza on the left-hand and Criterion block on right.





Holford's 1968 Plan



An imaginary view of the new Piccadilly at upper-deck level, looking north from the Criterion. On the left is the County Fire Office, then the façade of the new Monico building, then the decked covered concourse of the new London Pavilion building. Far left is the plan of the area with Stage One complete.

3. Piazzas, citizen-pedestrians and 'living at peace with the motor car'

THE SUNDAY TIMES APRIL 15, 1962

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The
Piccadilly
Plan...

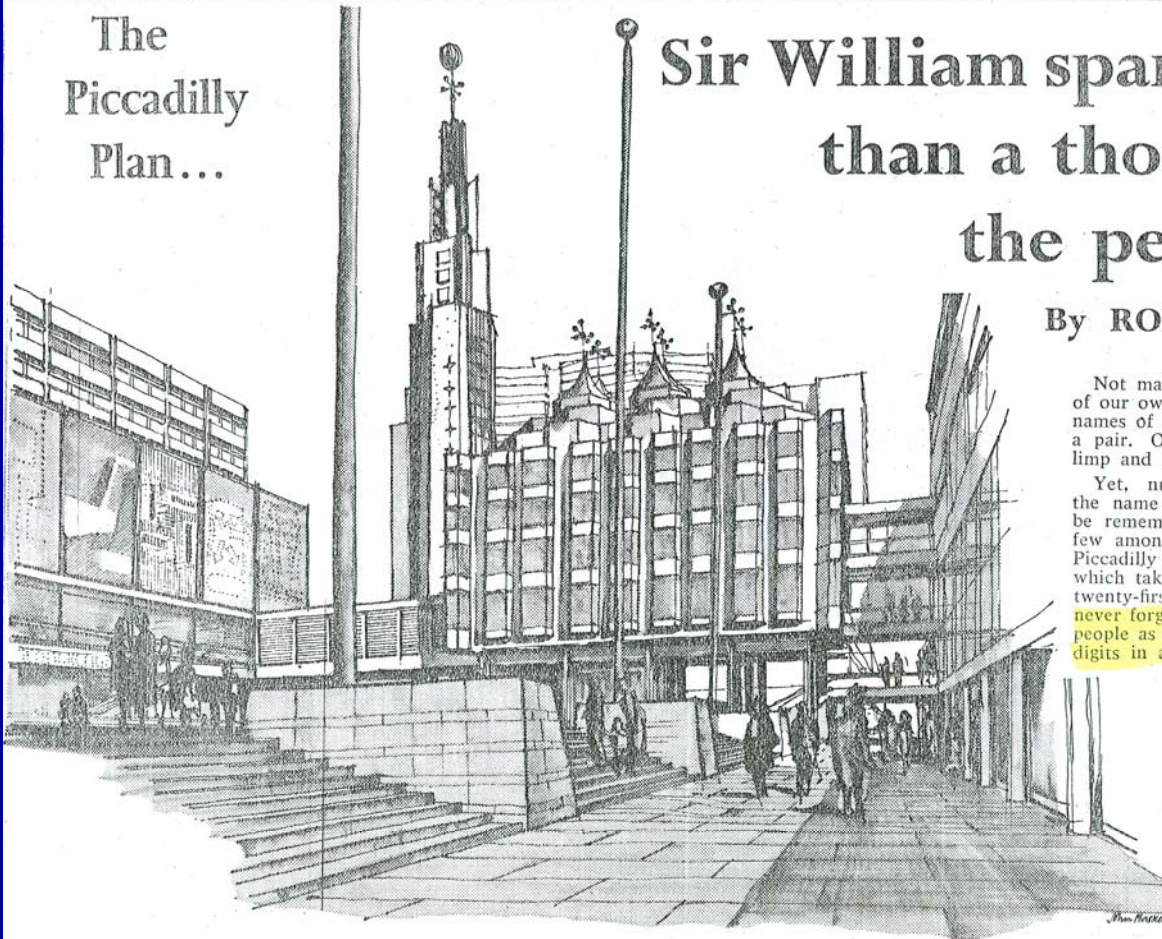
Sir William spares more than a thought for the pedestrian

By ROBERT HARLING

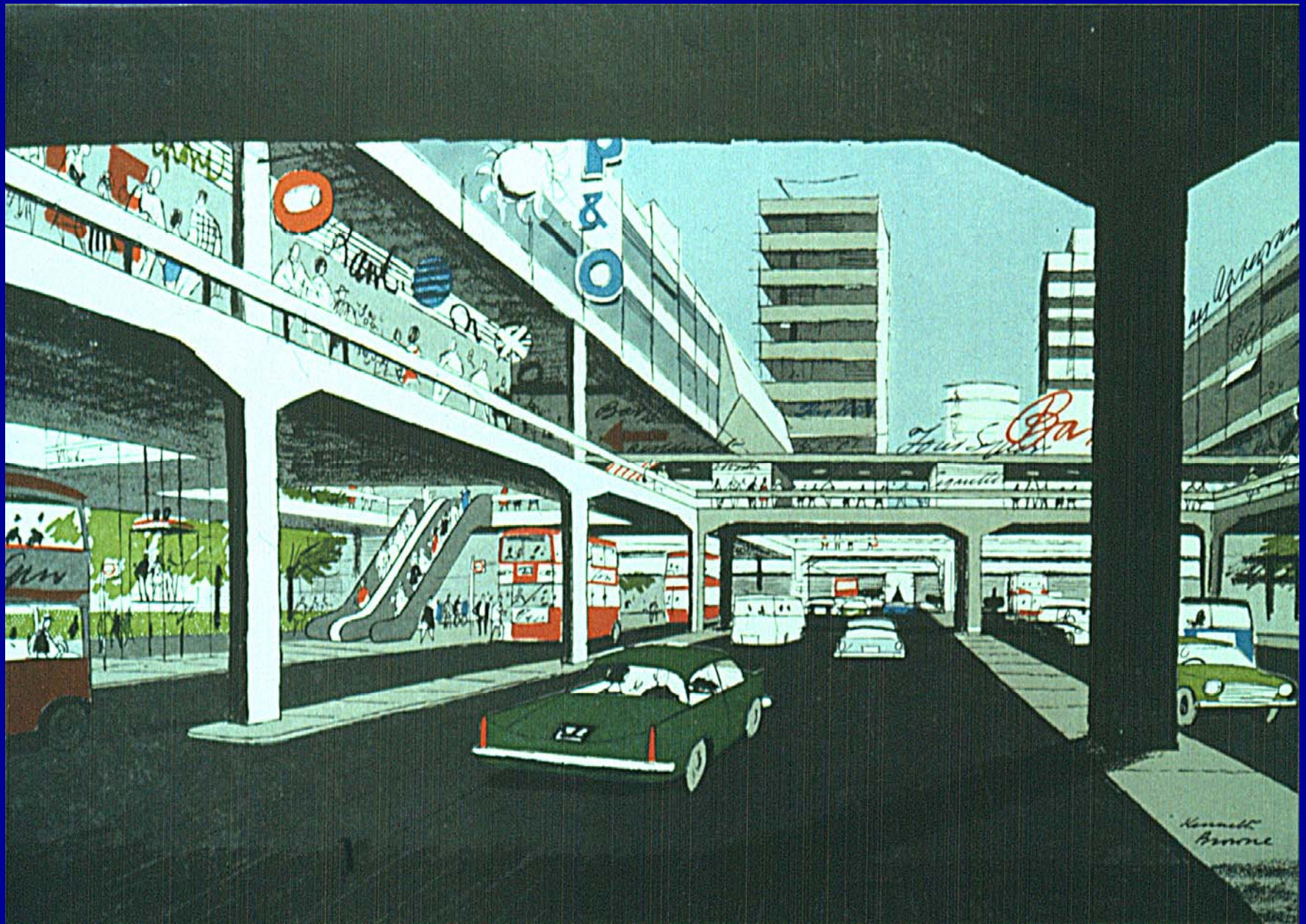
Not many of the names of the planners of our own time will be saluted as are the names of Nash or Wood of Bath, to name a pair. Our planners today work on too limp and niggardly a scale.

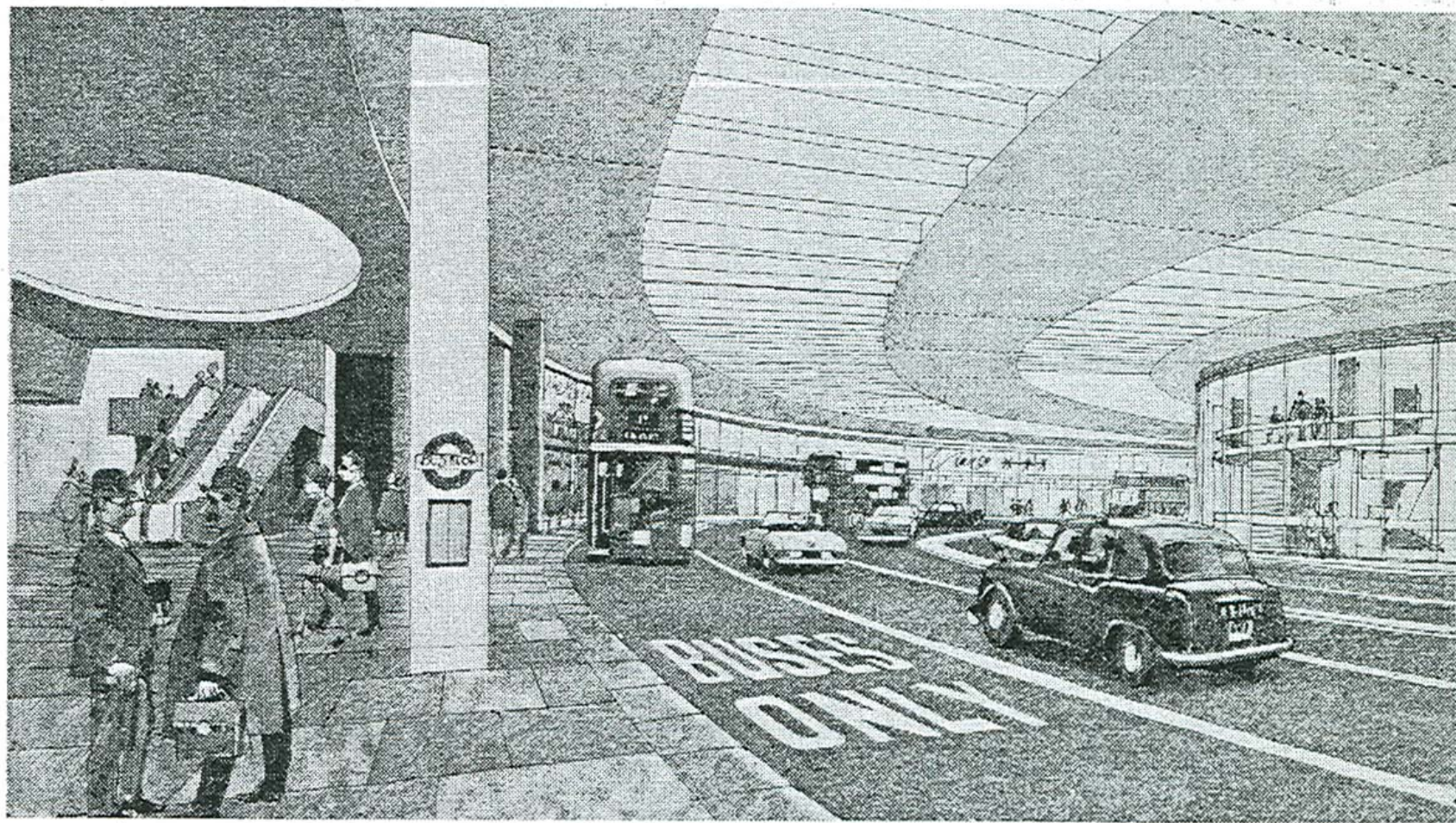
Yet, nuclear press-buttons permitting, the name of Sir William Holford should be remembered and saluted by at least a few among the crowds who will stand in Piccadilly Circus on the New Year's Eve which takes us from this century into the twenty-first. Here, at last, is a plan which never forgets, in any of its clauses, to treat people as human beings and not merely as digits in an urban computing machine.

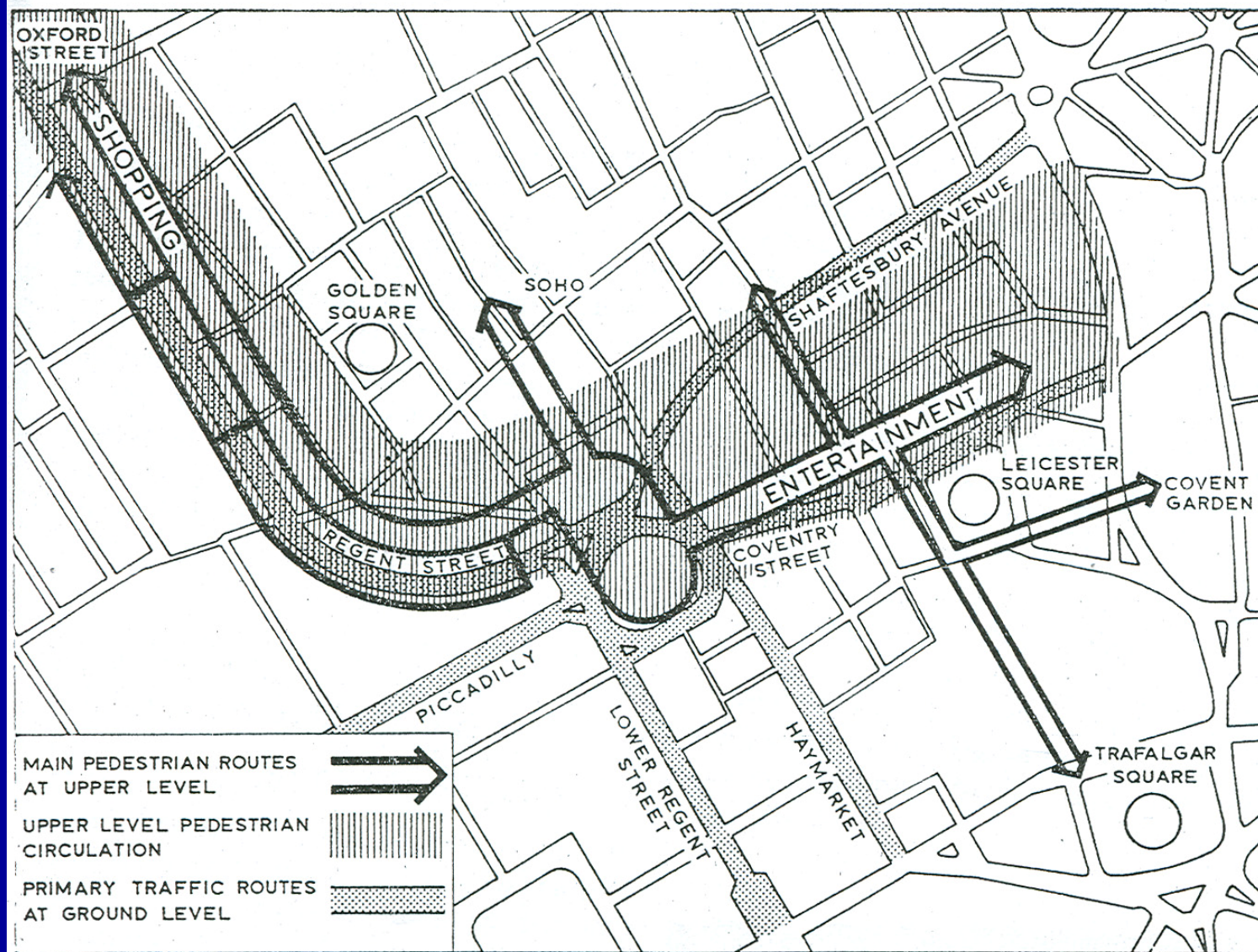
Sir William's revised scheme for Piccadilly Circus adds several imaginative touches to his earlier scheme, published in January, 1961, and the pedestrian has most cause to bless the name of Sir William. The Illuminations Tower, the New London Pavilion and other buildings have made the headlines, but, underlying all these architectural innovations, is evidence that Sir William and other planners (notably those dealing with the Knightsbridge-Sloane Street development) seem more determined than at any time in the past 30 years to take greater thought and care for the pedestrian, that almost outmoded individual in our community. We



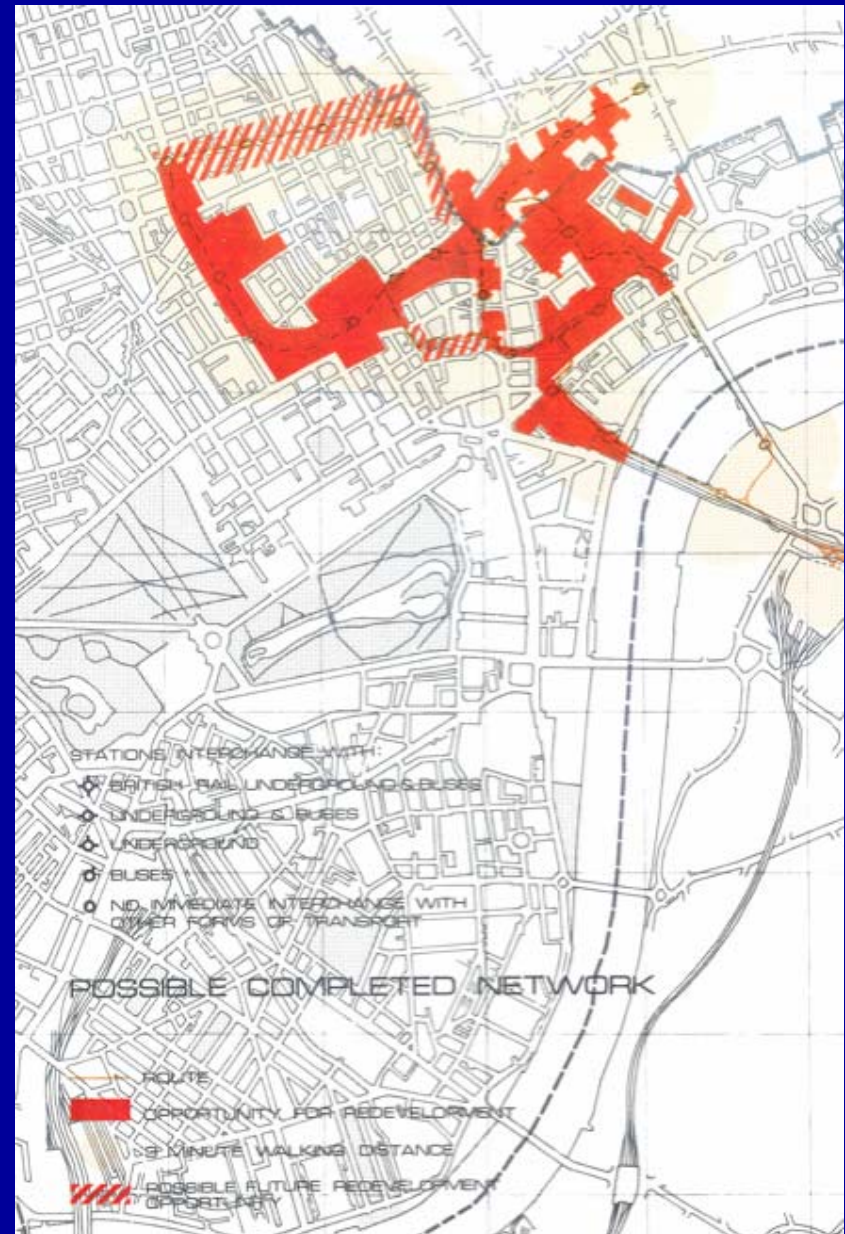
Looking east. Piazza on the left-hand and Criterion block on right.



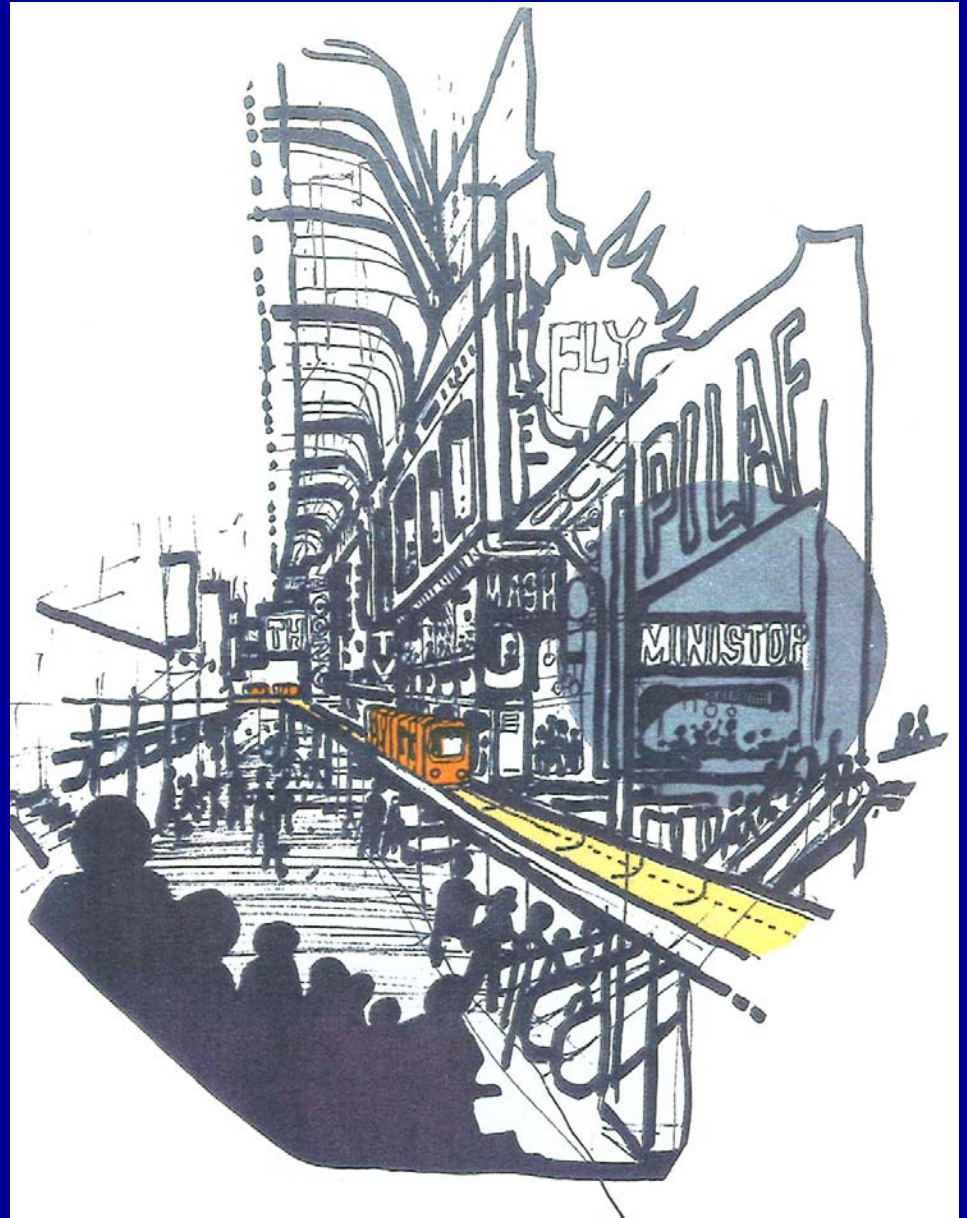


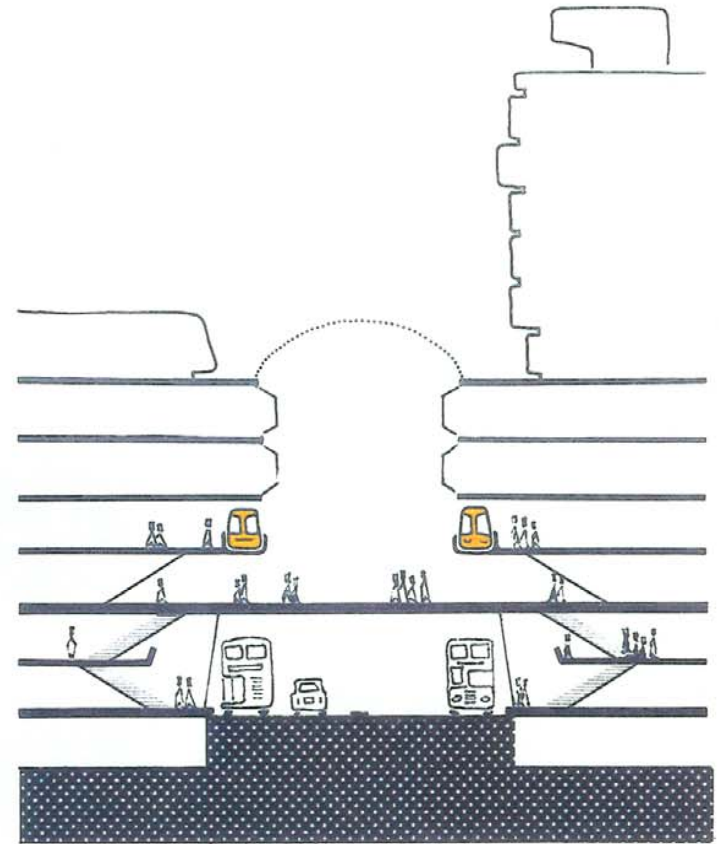


Aid to Pedestrian Movement (1971)



6. Sketch of an elevated system in the Covent Garden Area. Shows how the system plays an important role in the activity of the pedestrian spaces at deck level. This would certainly induce pedestrians to window shop from the new system.

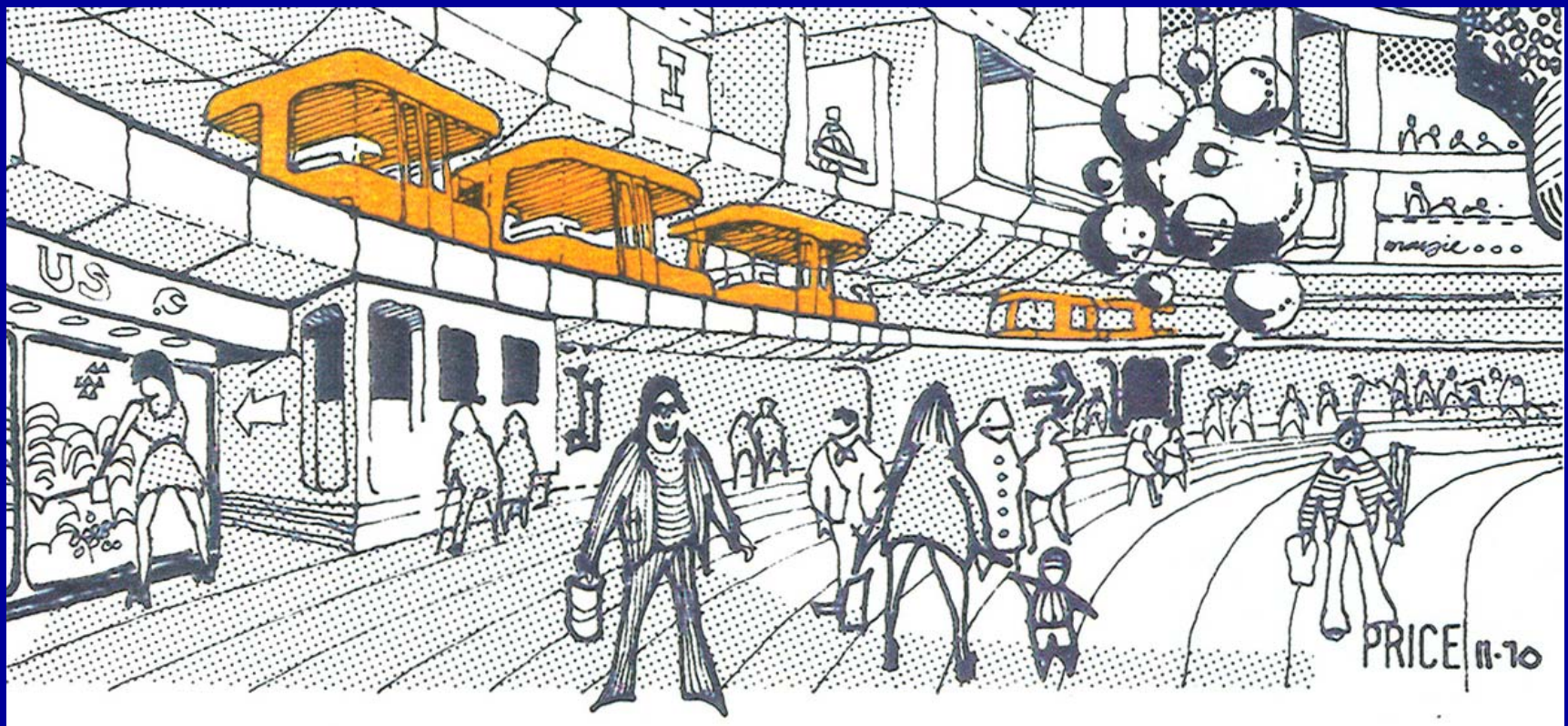




30. Regent Street showing a possible form of redevelopment incorporating an elevated pedestrian deck, adopting the line of the Regent Street traffic route beneath. The system has been inserted at a mezzanine level allowing shopping frontage and access to shops at this level as well as deck level, with vertical access to the bus stops at ground level.

The sketch and section are based upon proposals which have been made for the future redevelopment of Regent Street.

4. 'The shopper on whose pocket the prosperity of the area depended.' Consumption and comprehensive redevelopment.







‘In a decade dominated by youth, London has burst into bloom. It swings; it is the scene. This spring, as never before in modern times, London is switched on. Ancient elegance and new opulence are all tangled up in a dazzling blur of op and pop. The city is alive with birds (girls) and beatles, buzzing with minicars and telly stars, pulsing with half a dozen separate veins of excitement.’

The Piccadilly Plan...

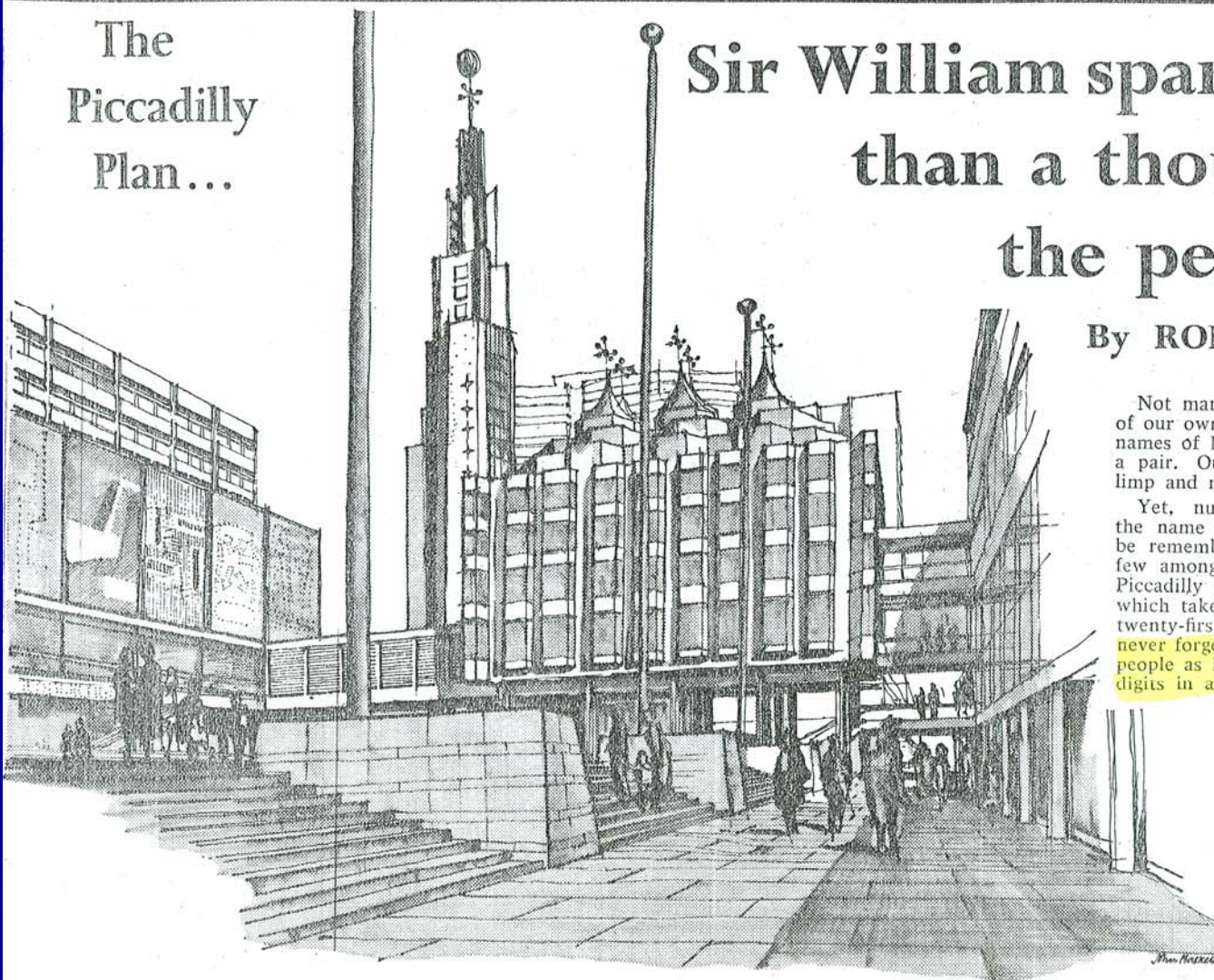
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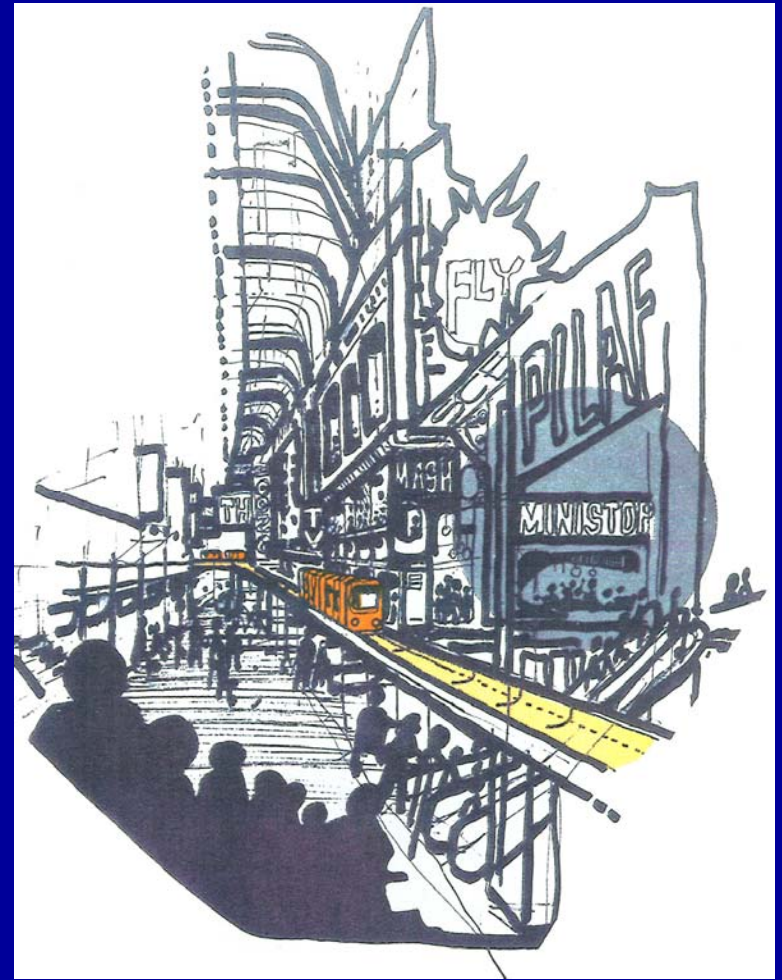
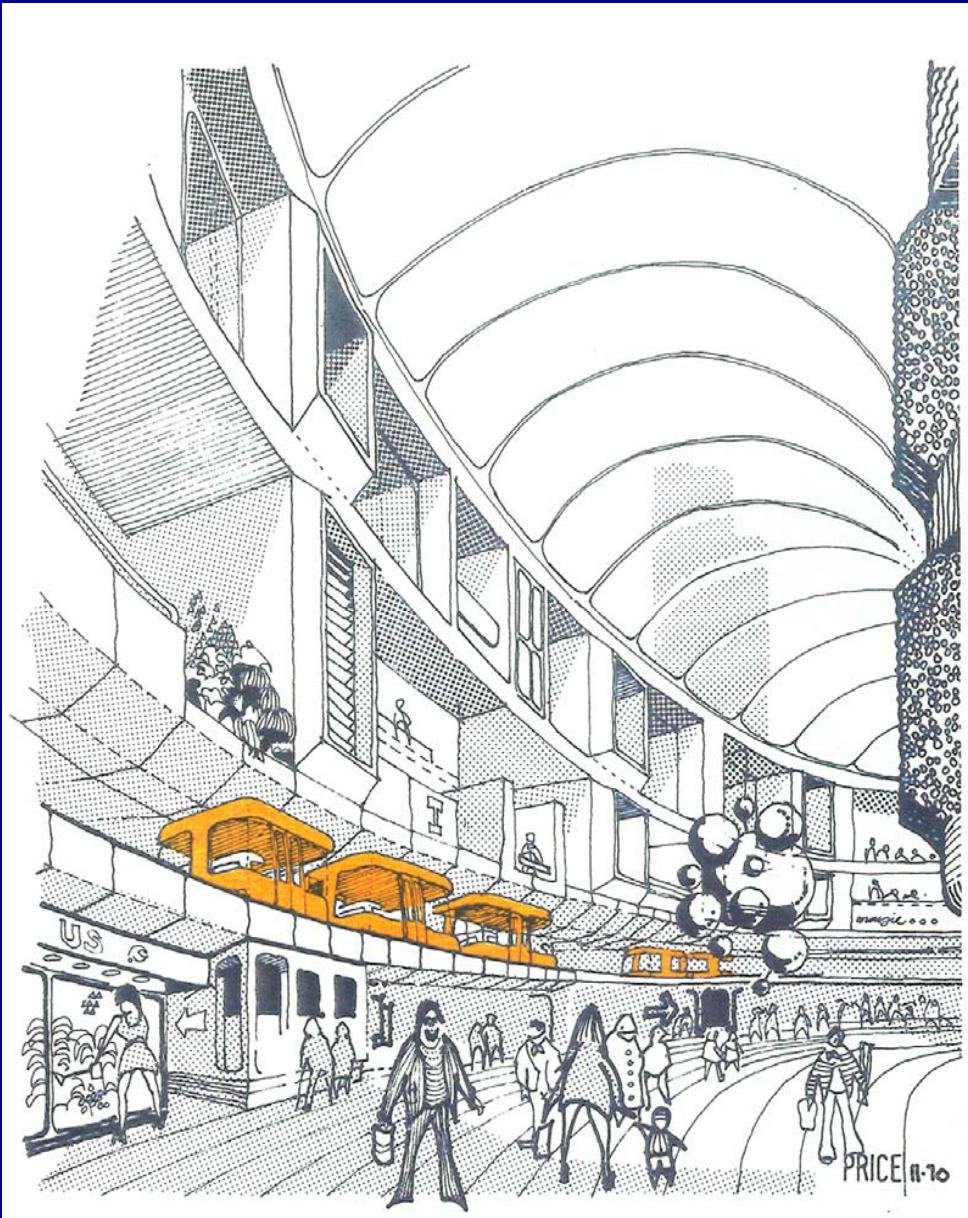
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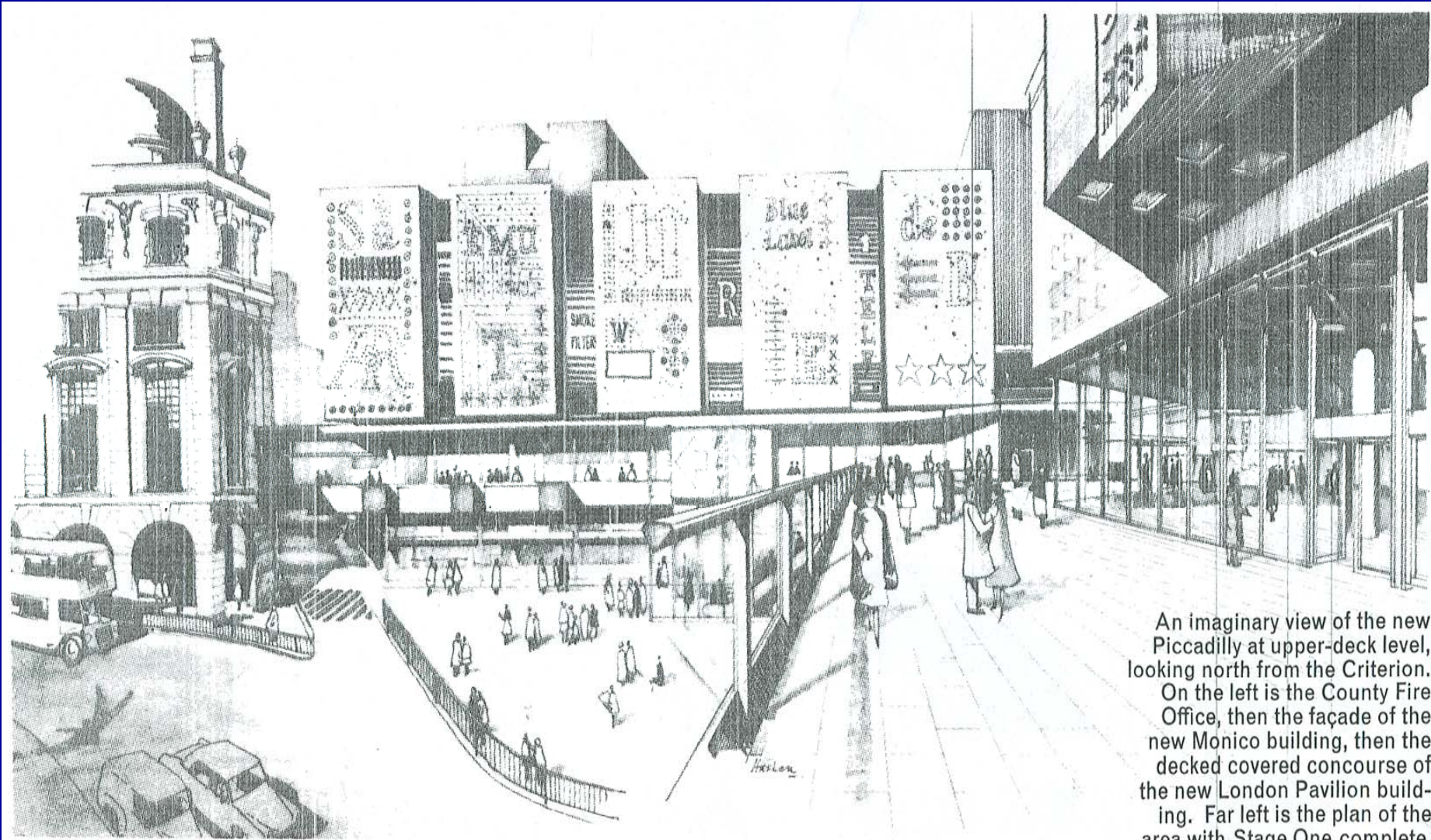
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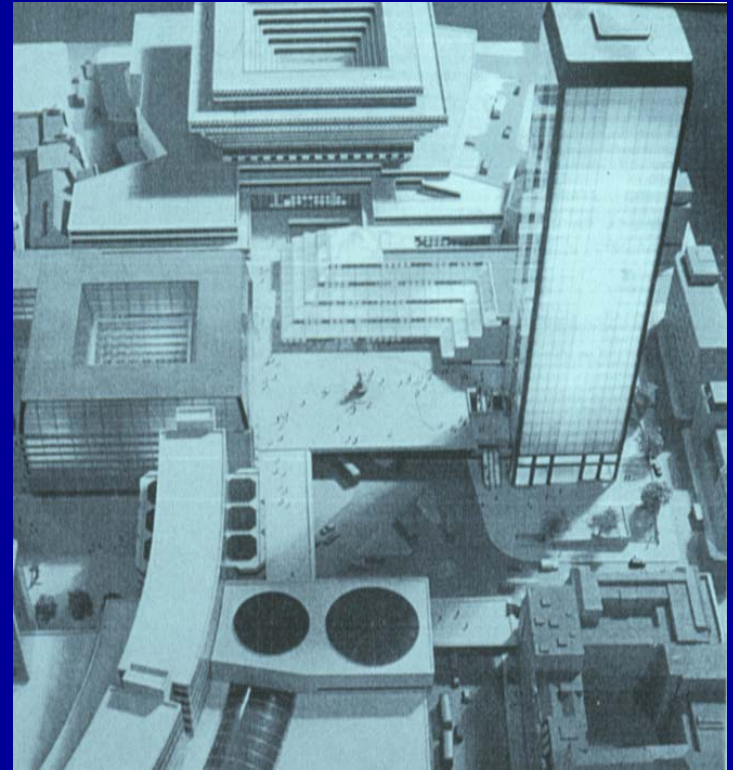
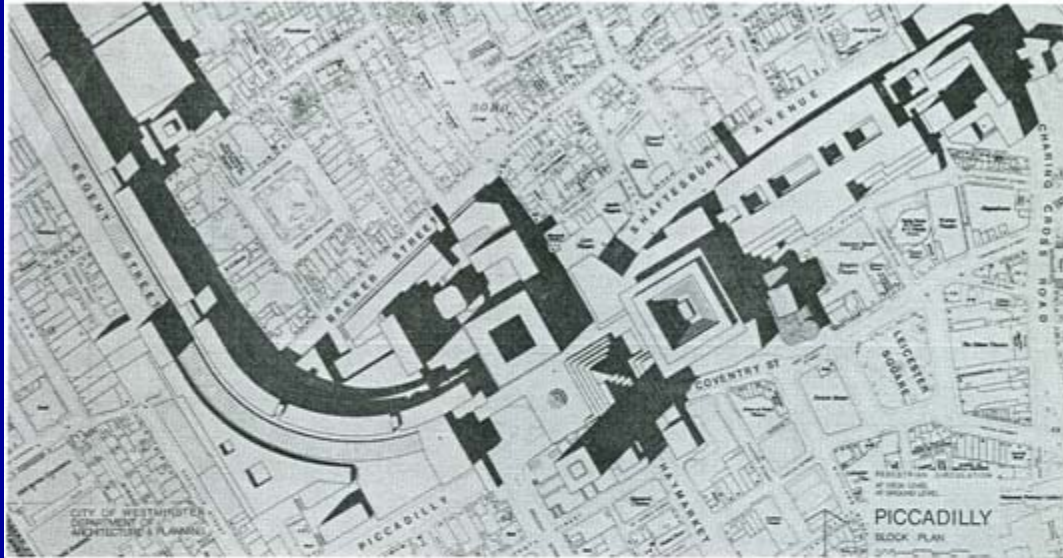




An imaginary view of the new Piccadilly at upper-deck level, looking north from the Criterion. On the left is the County Fire Office, then the façade of the new Monico building, then the decked covered concourse of the new London Pavilion building. Far left is the plan of the area with Stage One complete.

Conclusion

24 The Architects' Journal 10 July 1968



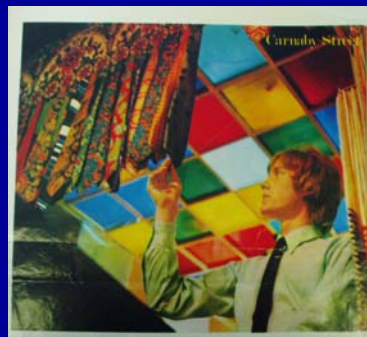
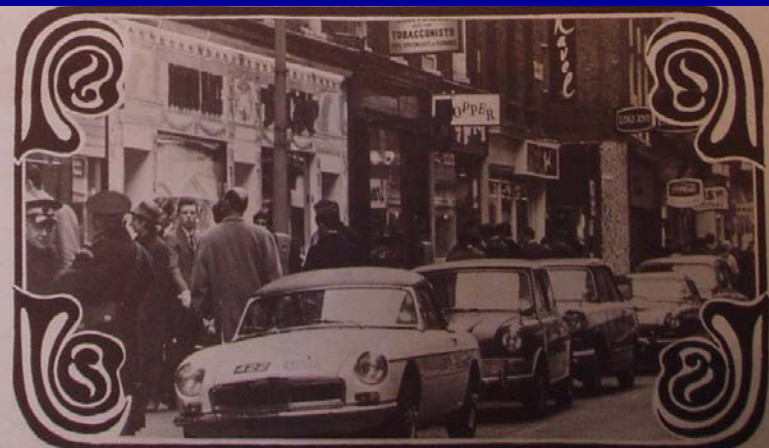


Carnaby se ha convertido en un centro turístico, al mismo título que la Torre de Londres. Gentes de todos los países acuden a la famosa calle, unos para comprar, otros para fugar. En ella se anuncian precisamente los espectáculos más susceptibles de interesar a los jóvenes.

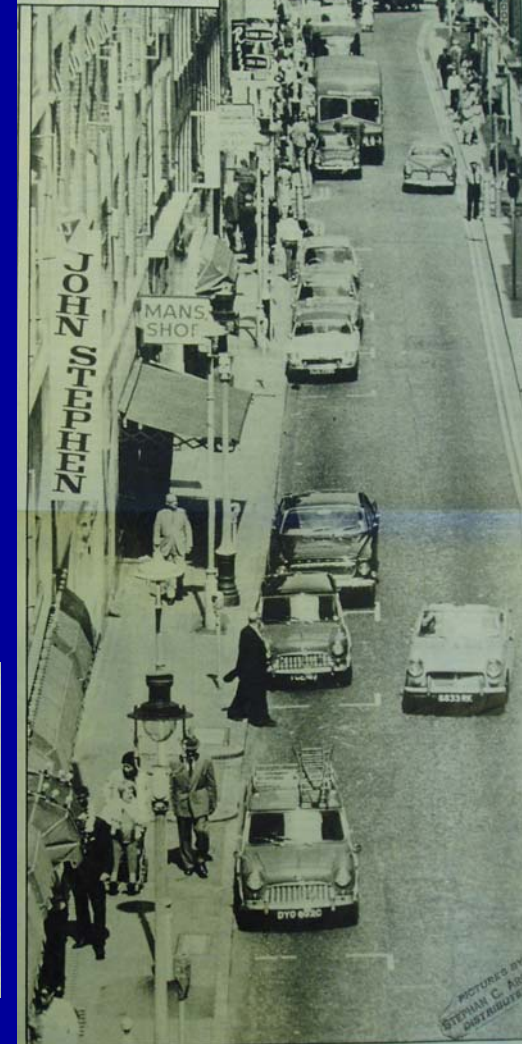


«Lord John», «His Clothes», «Pauls» son tiendas dedicadas a los hombres, aunque no sea extraño ver a muchachas comprando en ellas. «Lady Jane» —homenaje a los Rolling Stones— es esencialmente para ellas.

Carnaby Street



TONY E IL SUO REGNO

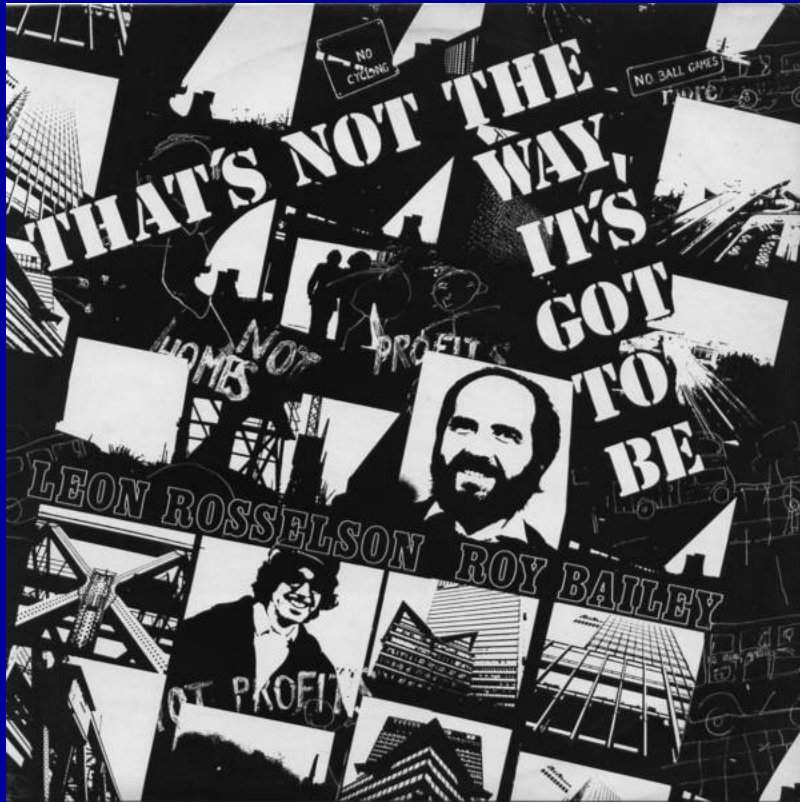


TONY E IL DUCA SI VESTONO QUI Londra. Una veduta di Carnaby Street, il regno in primo piano a sinistra l'immagine di uno dei suoi regni. Come i Beatles e i Rolling Stones, anche Tony Armstrong-Jones, il duca di Bedford, e Peter Nicholls sono clienti di Stephen, naturalmente seguono i suoi modelli ed accessori meno bizzarramente «violenti». Stephen possiede una villa a Brighton, due fabbriche di abiti, un'agenzia immobiliare, una scuola-guida per proprietari di Jaguar.

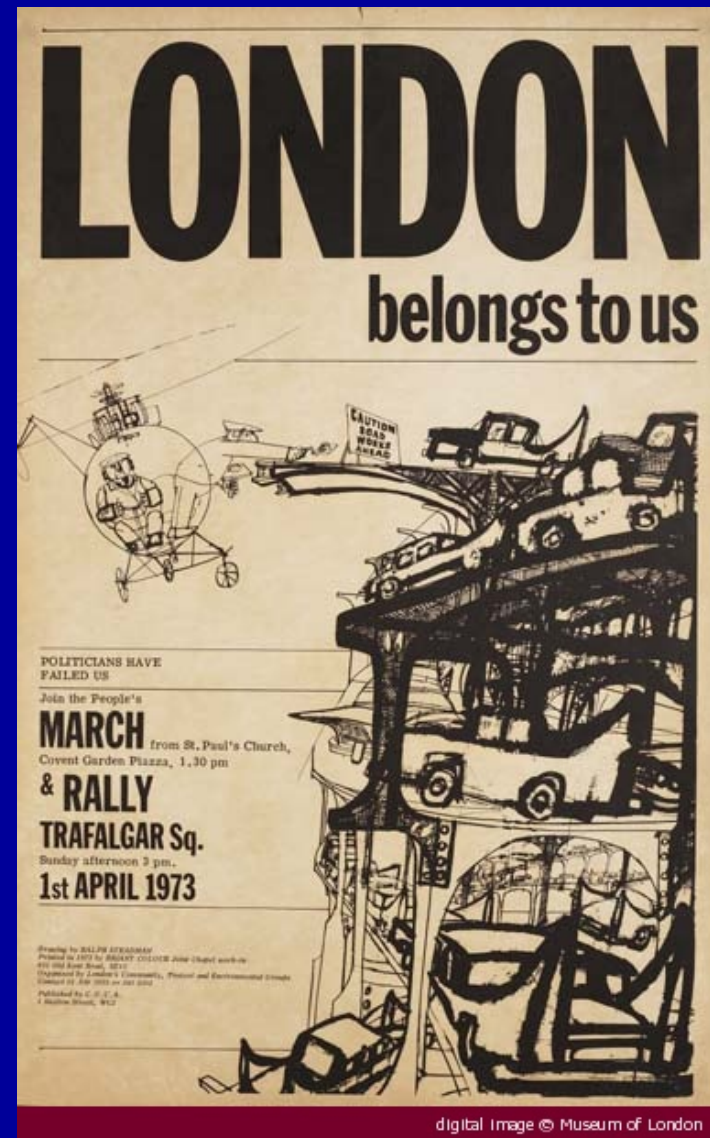
Covent Garden Comprehensive Redevelopment Plan

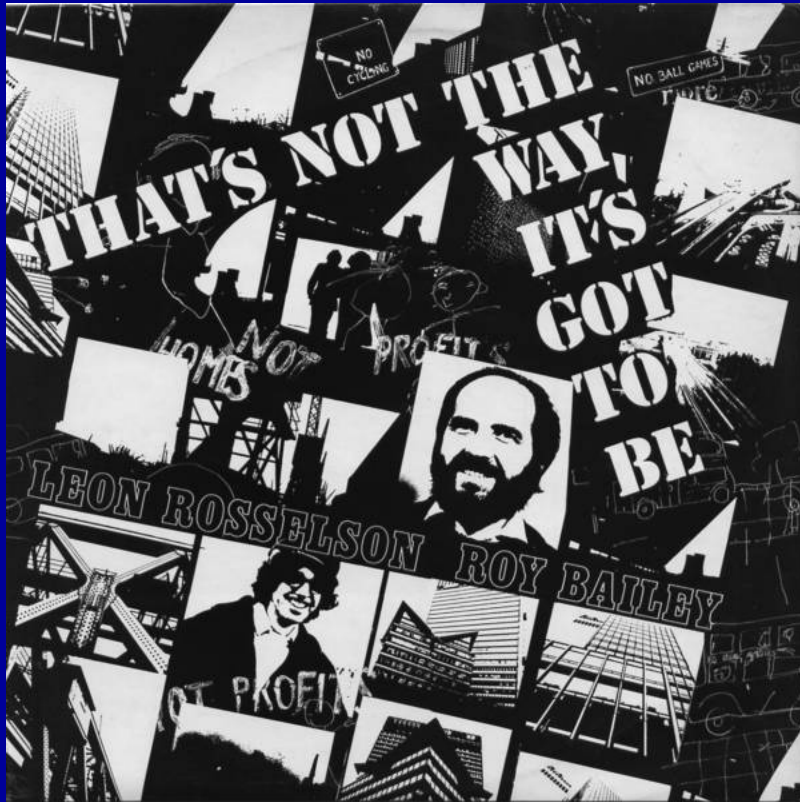
- Published 1968
- Abandoned 1974
- Protests about small businesses as well as 'community'
- Subsequent 'success' in terms of retailing and urban consumption, rather than the accommodation of a local community.





Leon Rosselson: Plan
(1974)





Leon Rosselson: Plan
(1974)



That's not the way it's got to be
People before property
We want a meeting place and not
a traffic jam
Let Eros speak for all of us
London's streets belong to us
No to the profits and the Piccadilly
plan.



